

LETTER OF MR. GURLEY.

OFFICE OF THE COLONIZATION SOCIETY,
WASHINGTON, APRIL 9, 1833.

Dear Sir—The Rev. G. T. Bedell having kindly favored me with a sight of your interesting letter, addressed to him on the subject of the American Colonization Society, I deem it a duty to that institution, of which I have for several years been Secretary, and a testimonial of but just respect for yourself, to communicate, briefly, my thoughts in regard to the claims of this Society, to the approbation and support of all the friends of God and man.

And here, may I be allowed to say, that I concur in the opinion expressed by the most illustrious man that England, (if not the world) has produced, (Lord Bacon) that the law of Jesus Christ, "Do unto others as you would that others should do unto you," "is the perfection of the law of nature and of nations," binding equally upon man as an individual, and as a member of political society; nor do I hesitate to admit, that the American Colonization Society, if it violate in principle or practice this law, is unworthy, utterly unworthy of private or public patronage.

But though the great law of duty between man and man, is *one*, immutable and perpetual, yet the action and conduct required by it, are relatively *various* in different individuals; and in regard to any one individual, dependent for *various modifications*, upon the circumstances in which he may be placed. The law of duty as a *principle* is forever the same, between parent and child, minister and people, master and servant, ruler and subject; yet no one will deny, that from their co-relative positions result widely *varying* and *varied forms* and *modes* of obedience. That which would be correct conduct in the parent towards the child, the minister towards the people, the master towards the servant, and the ruler towards the subject, would be incorrect in the child towards the parent, the people toward the minister, the servant towards the master, and the subject towards the ruler. Yet, *the law of love*, published by the Savior, and enforced and illustrated by his example, defines the relations and constitutes the immutable and eternal principle and ground of obligation between them. And as human *rights* should be defined, regulated, and measured in the influence and authority of the principle of duty to which we refer, their nature and extent may be, and doubtless are, no less liable to the *variations* and *modifications* of circumstances, than are the conduct and action by which this principle is most perfectly developed and expressed. It seems unreasonable to deny that the rights of human beings may be widely different; those for instance of parents and children, the magistrate and the citizen, the shipmaster and the sailor, the teacher and the scholar, while between them the obligation of Christian duty may be *fully* and *faithfully discharged*. In this connection I beg leave to introduce one or two sentences from an article in the Edinburgh Review for July, 1832, on "the political condition of the Italian states," which seems to me to contain just and important sentiments, bearing upon the question which I propose briefly to consider, that of the *duty of American Christians towards their colored population, and the means and measures best adapted to promote their improvement and happiness*.

"We are called on," says the writer of that article, "to make good by argument, and where necessary, by arms, the claims of man, as a member of society, to a distinct and vivid political existence. As man in his social state, is always moving backward or forward, the abstract claim can, in the case of no two societies, be quite alike, and important modifications of it in practice must constantly arise. *For the right of self-government, whether on the part of an individual or of a people, is founded on the fact, of its being a source of happiness to the parties.* In this point of view, it can be no fixed quantity; still less when more general consequences are taken into consideration. To the extent that questions of competition may unfortunately occur, the exercise of the right, and indeed the right itself,

In considering this question, it should be remembered, that in the United States, and mostly in the states of the south, are about 300,000 free people of color, elevated but little, (and in many cases not at all) above the condition of slaves; and 2,000,000 of slaves, with few exceptions, without education, incapable of providing for themselves, *property*, by the laws of the slaveholding states, and recognized as such by the Constitution of the Union; and by their habits of life, as well as by the darkness of their minds, unqualified either justly to appreciate, or rightly to enjoy the privileges of genuine freedom. Neither for the introduction of this people, nor for their present state, (except so far as its improvements have been unnecessarily prevented during the brief existence of the present generation) *can our citizens be held responsible*. The circumstances in which they found themselves, were not of their choosing. They must, then, take things as they are, and endeavor to make them as they should be without needless delay, and by all practicable means. The benefit of any one class is not, however, *alone* to be considered. The interest of the whites, as well as of the blacks, of masters as well as slaves, should be regarded; though I am ready to admit, that mere pecuniary advantage is not to be weighed in the balances against human liberty.

In what circumstances, then, did the founders of the American Colonization Society find themselves, when they devised; in what circumstances do its supporters find themselves, while they now promote the plan of this institution? They are living under a constitutional government of twenty-four United States, *united* for national purposes and the common welfare, but in other respects *separate and distinct*, each having the entire regulation of its own peculiar institutions and interests, and not responsible to other states, (legally I mean) or to the national government, either for the character of such institutions and interests, or for the laws it may enact, or the measures it may adopt, to preserve and defend them.

When you reflect upon the spirit of our national and state governments, republican throughout; upon the liberty of speech and of the press, guaranteed to every citizen of the United States; upon the easy and rapid communication between the citizens of the several States; upon the number and physical power of the slaves, the property invested in them, the differences of opinion in regard to slavery, arising from different degrees of light, from diversity of interest, and habits and prejudices, you will perceive at once the complicated and dangerous elements which enter into the question before us, and how a vast variety of difficult and delicate as well as weighty considerations, must receive attention and regard, in forming a judgment concerning Christian duty. Surely, if on any subject, caution and discretion are required, if on any subject, imprudent zeal and rash measures are to be deprecated, it must be in a case involving the permanent interests of millions of human beings; it must be in regard to changes to be wrought in the institutions of society old and established, connected and interwoven with its whole framework and constitution, running into and affecting the strongest passions and feelings, the most vital principles of its existence.

On this subject I am happy to fortify my opinion by that of the great Edwards, who, in his "thoughts on the revival of religion in New England," under the head of *carelessness of the future consequence of things*, remarks:

"Nothing can be more evident from the New Testament, than (alluding to the introduction of things new and strange) that such things ought to be done with great caution and moderation, to avoid the offence that may thereby be given, and the prejudices that might be raised to cloy and hinder the progress of religion. Yea, that it ought to be thus in things that are in themselves good and excellent, and of great weight; provided they are not things of the nature of absolute duty, which, though they may appear to be innovations, yet cannot be neglected without disobedience to the command of God. And the Apostles avoided teaching the Christians in those early days, at least for a great while, *some high and excellent divine truths*, because they could not bear them yet, (1 Cor. iii. c. 1, 2—Heb. v. 2. to the end.)—Thus strictly did the Apostles observe the rule that their blessed Master gave them, of not putting new wine into old bottles, lest they should burst the bottles and lose the wine. And how did Christ himself, while on earth, forbear so plainly to teach his disciples the *doctrines of Christianity* concerning his satisfaction, and the particular benefit of his death, resurrection and ascension, because in that infant state the disciples were then in, their minds were not *prepared for such instruction*. *I have many things yet to say unto you, but you cannot bear them now.* Howbeit, when He, the Spirit of Truth is come, he will guide you into all truth. And with many parables spake he the word unto them, as they were able to bear it. These things might be enough to convince any one, who does not think himself wiser than Christ and his Apostles, that *great prudence and caution* should be used in introducing things into the church of God, that are very uncommon, though in themselves they may be very excellent, lest by our rashness and imprudent haste we hinder religion much more than help it. Persons that are influenced by any indiscreet zeal, are always in too much haste: they are impatient of delays, and are therefore for jumping to the uppermost step first, before they have taken the preceding steps, whereby they expose themselves to fall and break their bones—oftentimes in their haste, they overshoot their mark, and frustrate their own end. They put that which they would obtain, farther out of reach than it was before, and establish and confirm that which they would remove. Things must have time to ripen. The prudent husbandman waits till

of duty binding upon all our citizens in their relation to this large class of our fellow-beings, but in regard to the plans to be adopted, and the means to be used by the humane and religious community to secure its full and most beneficial manifestations.

There are several *matters of fact* which it may be proper here to state, as they bear strongly upon the proposition maintained by me, that the humane and religious in our land, by giving a liberal and united support to the American Colonization Society, contribute in the most effectual manner, possible, at present, to the improvement and happiness of our entire colored population.

1. The first fact to which I allude is this—*some* circumstances beyond the control not only of the Christian community, but of the American people, and for which they of course are not responsible, and others for which they are responsible, but which no enlightened man can expect, (at least for ages to come) will be materially changed, operate to prevent the free people of color, while in this country, from rising to that elevation, happiness and usefulness which they might enjoy in Africa. *Not here, can they feel the same sense of freedom, the same enterprise and hope, and those strong motives of action, which might cause their elevation in a distant community, and on a wider field for honorable and useful conduct.*

2. Nothing can be safely and peacefully done for the *direct* and immediate abolition of slavery, but with the *consent of the masters*.

3. In the present state of things, no general effort, (and by this I mean no effort in which good men from every state of the union can unite) can be made for the benefit of any portion of our colored population, except such as in its direct action, shall be confined exclusively to the *FREE*.

4. Such a general effort, for the benefit of the *FREE* if connected with their colonization in Africa, will exert a *far more powerful influence* in favor of the voluntary manumission of slaves than if directed to their improvement in the United States; because of the prevailing opinion at the South, that the instruction and elevation of the free will produce discontent in the slaves; that such instruction and elevation would prove of but comparatively small value to those who enjoyed them; and that the *emancipation* of the slaves, should they remain in this country, would be followed by evils *greater than slavery itself*. This opinion may be erroneous, but it cannot be *suddenly* changed; and if erroneous, will be soonest corrected by the reflections which the prosecution of the scheme of African colonization will inevitably excite.

The question is not whether slavery as it exists, in law and practice, in our southern states, be, to a great extent, a violation of the principles of Christian duty between man and man, and ought, therefore, so far as it is such violation, to be immediately modified and abolished; but what are the *means to be used* by the humane and religious, to change the *will* of those who alone have the power, and incline them safely and wisely to remedy the evil. If general emancipation is ever to be *peacefully* effected, it must be as I have already said, with the *consent of the masters*; and here I fearlessly avow the opinion, that to sustain, in the public view, and the judgment of the law, the relation of master to slave, is not *necessarily*, and in thousands of instances, is not *actually*, a violation of Christian duty. To dissolve this relation now would, I conceive, in numerous instances, be, on the part of the masters, a positive violation of that law of love, which, as disciples of Christ, they are bound to obey. It would be doing to others, as in an exchange of circumstances, they would not wish others to do to them. The correctness of this opinion will be evident, if you consider the position of a Christian master inheriting a large estate in Virginia or South Carolina, upon which are numerous slaves, ignorant, unprepared, (from servile habits of dependence upon the will of another for direction and support) to manage for themselves, connected by marriage with slaves, on neighboring plantations, over which he has no control, and who can give liberty to his slaves, *only* on condition of their removal from the limits of the state. The question for such a master to decide, is not, (so far as his conduct is concerned) whether the laws of his state be right or wrong, but one of *individual duty* towards the unfortunate human beings of which he is recognized as master, and towards the community in which he resides. That he is morally right in sustaining the relation of master on any other *principle* than that of the *law of love*, or any longer than he can do it with obedience to that law, I neither believe nor admit.

I will now state more explicitly, some reasons to show that in giving a *liberal* and *united support* to the American Colonization Society, the humane and religious of our land, *will in the present state of things best promote the interests of our whole colored population*.

I say in the *present state of things*, because I am by no means certain, that other measures may not at some future time be required, and wisely and judiciously adopted.

I. The first reason I offer is, that this Society proposes the *only plan* of benevolent action, for the benefit of this population, in which our *whole* benevolent community can be expected to unite. As union of sentiment and action among a people, gives vast powers to their efforts, this consideration, were other plans proposed equally good, strongly recommends as *superior* that of the Society.

II. The plan of the Society, is the *best* that can be devised, for those most directly interested in it—the *free people of color*. No reflecting man can deny, that causes not under the control of humanity, legislation or religion, retard the improvement, depress the mind, and limit the happiness and usefulness of this class in the United States, and that these causes have no *existence* in Africa.

invention, excite enterprise, and form him for high and honorable action. He is placed in the widest field for usefulness, and exerts a most *beneficial*, and (as the Colony shall advance) may be expected to exert a most extensive influence upon the African tribes.

III. The Society is most happily *adapted to exert a powerful influence in favor of the voluntary emancipation of slaves.*

I do not hesitate to acknowledge, that my hope of the *peaceful* abolition of slavery in this country, rests mainly upon the *moral* and *religious* sentiments of my countrymen. This, I believe to be inconsistent with the permanency of the system. If in *any other* land slavery can be perpetual, it cannot be perpetual *here*. As well might the iceberg remain undissolved amid the sunny tropics, as this system long remain amid the kind and gentle influences that are here working its destruction. The spirit and principles of our government, the precepts of our holy religion, and the general feelings of our people *at the South*, as well as at the *North*, are against it as a permanent system. But it must be abolished, *by and not against* the will of the South. All, or nearly all Americans, cherish the desire and expectation that it will one day be abolished.

Two things have operated in the United States *against emancipation*. 1st, apprehensions on the part of the South, of *rash and dangerous interference from the North*. And 2dly, *Fears that abolition could not be effected without producing evils greater than slavery itself*. By the Colonization Society, *both the obstacles have in a great measure been removed*. *Southern men* adopted the plan of the Society, at its origin, not only as benevolent in itself, but as one, which if successful, would in their opinion, be extensively adopted by individuals and states with a *view to emancipation*; and *Northern men* approved of it, not only because they saw its benevolence towards the free people of color, and its promise of good to Africa, but because of *all plans, this alone* received the sanction of their Southern brethren, as well adapted to promote the *voluntary abolition of slavery*. The fact, that the Society has assumed common ground, on which the *benevolent from the North and South can unite, adds immensely to its moral influence on the system of slavery*. It creates mutual confidence. It represses the over-heated zeal of the North, and excites the too inactive humanity of the South. It allays the spirit of the North, by proving that the South is willing to adopt measures, with a view to the ultimate relief and elevation of its whole colored population, and it gives activity to the humanity of the South, by showing that the North is not disposed to interfere with its real or imaginary rights; that its own humanity may be safely indulged; that none will *unduly hasten* the measures it may suggest, and by making it obvious, that to repress the dictates of that humanity, or to restrain its power, is to violate the plainest principles of duty. The correct sentiments of the South and the North, are thus brought to *flow harmoniously in the same channel*. The reflections and good feelings of intelligent and virtuous men in all parts of the country on this subject, are held in *fellowship and communion*. Truth and charity touch the hearts of our citizens, while no spirit of disaffection or revolt stirs the soul of the slave.

It is, perhaps, worthy of remark, that the Society exerts *no influence* upon slavery, except a *moral influence*, and therefore no one can, with the least show of reason, object to its proceedings. In many of the slave-holding States, emancipation within their limits is prohibited by law, and thus a right which many masters would highly value, is denied to them; but should the advocate of perpetual slavery, condemn the Society for enabling such masters to exercise this right, without any violation of law, and with advantage to the slave, he would prove himself no less hostile to the *freedom of the master* than of the *slave*; no less the enemy of the *general principle* of liberty, than of the liberty of *particular* individuals. The influence of the Society on slavery, being solely a moral influence, disarms opposition; leaving nothing for foes to contend with, but themselves and goodness and truth.

It is a prevailing opinion among the humane and virtuous citizens of the South, that whenever slaves can be liberated, with benefit to themselves, without danger to the public, they *ought* to be liberated. The sentiment of humanity and charity to which we must look for their emancipation, requires, doubtless, to be generally strengthened and excited to greater activity. The Society shows the *practicability* of emancipation on both the conditions just mentioned, and thus, gives the opportunity and offers powerful inducements for the discharge of an acknowledged obligation. It leaves no valid excuse for perpetuating slavery on the ground of necessity. It does more. It constantly invites public attention to the subject of slavery, excites every where reflection upon it, and by indirect influence, (the more *efficient* because *indirect*) awakens reason and conscience to perform their office in making evident our duties, and enforcing the fulfilment of them towards our whole colored population.

If it be true, that slavery can be peacefully abolished, only with the consent of the South; if it be true, that by the constitution of the land, the North has not the right, if it had the power, to coerce abolition; if it be true, that the moral obligation to abolish slavery, whenever circumstances allow of its abolition, without producing evils greater than slavery itself, be extensively acknowledged at the South; if it be true, that a practicable scheme for the safe and gradual abolition of the system, be now proposed by the Colonization Society; what more is required to secure such abolition, except the *will* to accomplish it on the part of our southern communities? The *only desirable influence* to be exerted by any voluntary association, on

fluences, by touching examples of goodness, by the beautiful and beneficial effects of such feelings in the lives of those who cherish them, and as manifested in the blessed consequences resulting from their exercise, to those who are the objects of them. Such an indirect influence, gentle, persuasive, but mighty, does the Colonization Society send forth on the public mind in favor of emancipation. Since its origin, it *has done more* to produce voluntary emancipation than all other causes and influences; and the growing success of its enterprise, adds daily and immensely to its moral power.

I am well aware, that this Society is denounced in terms of unmeasured reproach by Mr. Garrison and others, as designed and tending to strengthen, rather than weaken the system of slavery. They demand immediate, unconditional, universal emancipation. I regard the principles of these men as in many respects, fundamentally *false*, and their measures as endangering the stability of our Union, the general welfare of the country, and the best interests of our colored population. I will here note some of their fundamental errors of opinion.

1. The doctrine that a temporary relation, (involving authority on the one side, and dependence, and a general obedience and service on the other) between master and slave, *can in no case be innocent*.

2. That such a relation ought to be instantly dissolved *without regard to the interests of the parties concerned*.

3. That in present circumstances, slavery ought to be abolished by means, not acting *solely through*, but to a great degree *against* and in *defiance* of the will of the South.

4. That our colored population can be as prosperous and happy and useful in this country, as when formed into a community, separate and distinct from the whites.

5. That in the expression of our individual opinions, and the exertion of our individual influence, on the subject of slavery, regard is not to be had to *circumstances and consequences*, that we are no less at liberty to inform the slaves of their wrongs, degradation and misery, than bound to proclaim Truth to those who are prepared to receive it, and to enforce moral obligations upon the masters.

6. That the best way, if not the only way, to produce the abolition of slavery in this country, is to thunder forth denunciations against it as a flagrant crime, *universally*, against God and man, not to be tolerated under any modifications, for a moment, but to be destroyed at a blow.

Were doctrines like these true, (and I believe them to be false,) the publication of them by citizens of the Northern States, while opinion at the South remains as at present, can do little but arouse the deepest and most violent feelings of our nature, in hostility towards those who inculcate them; and produce a fixed purpose to repel at all hazards, any attempted invasion of southern rights on the subject of slavery. It will, if persisted in, I fear, produce a conflict between the North and the South, more appalling than any ever witnessed in our country.—The most terrible elements of human passion will be wrought into fury; the wings of an awful darkness will overshadow us, while all hearts tremble, and all faces turn pale with dismay.

I have not alluded to the hopes cherished by our Institution, that the object which it is endeavoring to accomplish, will soon be deemed worthy of the liberal patronage of the Legislatures of the States, and of the Federal Government. To this object, Maryland and Virginia have already made generous appropriations. The scheme has also received the favorable notice of Congress, and it is expected will soon receive its aid.

I have said nothing of the success which, under the good providence of God, has attended our efforts in establishing the Colony of Liberia. With the origin, present state and promise of that Colony, you are doubtless acquainted. It presents, on the African coast, a well ordered christian community of men of color, contented and prosperous, with schools and churches, courts of justice, and a periodical press; growing in enterprise, intelligence and wealth, and exerting a powerful and benign influence over the native tribes. It is a beautiful monument, erected on a dark and distant shore, to the honor of American benevolence.—It stands a citadel of civilization and freedom, within the precincts of barbarism; a temple of worship for the ever living God, on the territories of superstition, where humanity has long been covered with the shame and bound in the chains of an inscrutable bondage. It offers a blessed asylum to the free man of color, and is the *hope of the slave*.

I rejoice to know, that it has awoke the sympathies, and enlisted the charities of the people of England. We highly appreciate the earnestness and resolution of Mr. Cresson, who perseveres in his efforts for this sacred cause, without the desire or expectation of pecuniary reward, and I cannot adequately express my respect and affection for the high-souled in England, who have so magnanimously and liberally responded to his appeals, and thus proved themselves sharers in the sublime (may I not say divine) spirit of charity, which overlooking the boundaries of country, and all the diversities of rank, condition, and aspect among men, makes its possessors feel their relationship to the whole race, and kindles within their bosoms an undying zeal for the universal prosperity and happiness of mankind.

With the highest esteem and respect,